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Conservatism and innovation in Anglo-Saxon scribal practice

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Running head. Conservatism and innovation in Anglo-Saxon scribal practice

Abstract. The text of the Old English *Bede* found in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS. 41 (B) is remarkable for its extensively updated language, when compared with other, earlier *Bede* manuscripts. This paper compares B with other manuscripts of the *Bede* to uncover some of the scribal decisions which shape the surviving text. B's text is subject to many alterations, indicating a translator scribe who frequently updated and altered the language of his exemplar (i.e. the manuscript from which he copied to produce the present text). However, the presence of a number of nonsensical readings points to a scribe who sometimes struggled to make sense of the text in front of him and whose abilities did not extend far enough to create a good reading in the face of these difficulties. These scribal decisions allow us to identify factors which influenced the shape of B's text, such as the interplay between B's now-lost exemplar and its scribes' working methods. Careful analysis of some of B's linguistic features enables us to draw conclusions about the age and status of its exemplar and to recover some part of a lost *Bede* manuscript.

Keywords: Old English, late West-Saxon, Mercian, philology, manuscripts, scribal practice, prose translations, Bede

1. Introduction

Of the four main surviving manuscripts of the Old English *Bede*, one in particular, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS. 41 (B), has attracted attention for the way its scribes have updated the language of the text, turning the *Bede's* original Mercian dialect into the late West-Saxon more familiar to its 11th-century scribes.¹ The manuscript dates from the first half of the 11th century, according to Ker (1957: 43), and was completed by two scribes (here referred to as B1 and B2). The first scribe (B1) wrote from the beginning of the manuscript as far as p. 190 (towards the end of Book 3 of the *Bede*), while the second (B2) was responsible for the text from p. 190 to

¹ The other surviving witnesses of the Old English *Bede* are the following: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Tanner 10 (T), s. x¹; Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS. 279B (O), s. xiⁱⁿ; Cambridge, University Library, MS. Kk 3.18 (Ca), s. xi². In addition to these four complete (or near-complete) manuscripts, a badly fire-damaged copy exists in London, British Library, MS. Cotton Otho B.xi (C), s. x^{med}, from which a transcript was made by Laurence Nowell in the 16th century (CN). Finally, London, British Library, MS. Cotton Domitian ix, f.11 (Z), s. xⁱⁿ contains three short excerpts from the *Bede*. All dates are those given by Ker (1957).

the end. A third scribe copied a wealth of material into B's margins, but as the hand is not contemporary with the main text, and none of these marginal texts are part of the Old English *Bede*, this paper considers only the performances of the first two scribes.

While the manuscript gives us some clear evidence of the kinds of changes late-Anglo-Saxon scribes could (and did) make to the texts they copied, it is difficult to contextualize these changes in the case of B. We know that the manuscript was in the possession of Exeter cathedral by the second half of the 11th century, as a note recording its donation by Exeter's archbishop Leofric survives on p. 488. However, studies of other manuscripts donated by Leofric during his episcopacy (1046–1072) show that, while some books were produced in Exeter itself, others were acquired from elsewhere to furnish the cathedral (Treharne 2003, 2007). As B is not written in a hand that has been identified with Exeter, and as it predates Leofric's episcopacy, it seems likely that it is a manuscript which was produced in another center, before being brought to Exeter. Budny (1997: 507) suggests a minor center in the south of England as a probable place of origin, while Grant (1989: 8) tentatively posits a Winchester connection, based on a comparison of B's main and marginal texts with those found in other manuscripts. On the other hand, Stokes (2014: 142) notes that palaeographically B shares similarities with manuscripts for which he suggests an origin at Crediton (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Eng. hist. a.2; London, British Library, Stowe Charter 34). Although firm evidence for

such an attribution is lacking, he states that “production at a house like Crediton seems entirely plausible.”

B was rather neglected by early commentators. When preparing his edition of the *Bede*, Miller was disappointed with B’s text because it deviated so strongly from the Mercian character of the earlier manuscripts. He abandoned his plan to base an edition on the manuscript because “the scribe or editor of B’s text has dealt very freely with his author, changing forms and words and recasting sentences” (1890: v–vi), and instead he worked from T, whose more Mercian character he felt to be closer to the language of the *Bede*’s archetype. B’s text was edited (along with that of O) by Schipper (1899), but in spite of this, comparatively little work focused on B itself until the late 20th century. More recent work by Grant (1989) and Rowley (2004, 2011) has done much to rehabilitate B’s reputation as a manuscript worthy of study. While Campbell (1951: 351) had noted that B was “the most radical and violent of all the manuscripts in its changes of the text,” Grant (1989) focuses on the differences between B’s West-Saxon language and the Mercian of earlier manuscripts. Rowley points out that it is this dialect shift itself which has prompted scholars to view B as “a mediocre text in the wrong language” (2004: 11), when compared with earlier texts containing more Mercian features, such as T.

This article consists of three main sections. After outlining the methodology used to uncover the scribal layers within the text, I show how this reveals some examples of the exemplar forms retained by B1.

Following this, B1's behavior as a textual emender is examined, with a focus on the methods he used to overcome the textual problems he encountered. Despite his effective shaping of B's text in many ways, there are some notable instances where B1 fails to control the *Bede's* text, resulting in emendations which do not appear to make sense. I discuss three groups of emendations. First are those which can be described as successful in that they produce text which, although altered from that of the exemplar, provides the reader with a credible reading and one in which a textual alteration would not be noticed without comparison with other manuscripts. The second group consists of emendations in which word division and spacing appear to play a role, while the third group includes those where the new reading seems to be dependent on the shape and sequence of the exemplar's graphs. This study is based on a close examination of the text of Book 3 of the *Bede*, as it appears in manuscripts T, O, Ca, and B. The majority of the selected text was copied by B1, with a smaller section by B2.²

2. Methodology

² Book 3 of B contains just under 18,000 graphic units. Of these, about 2,000 are by B2. All quotations from the *Bede* are presented as they appear in the relevant manuscript. References are to the page/folio of the manuscript, with additional references by page and line number to Miller's (1890) edition.

When a scribe copies a manuscript, there are three courses of action available to him. Firstly, he may copy the text exactly as it appears in his exemplar and produce, through his literatim copying, a manuscript that is identical to its parent. Alternatively, the scribe can ‘translate’ the exemplar text as he writes and update the original language into dialectal, grammatical, or lexical forms that accord with those of his own training or preferences. As a third option, the scribe may combine the first two approaches, updating some features, while preserving others (Laing 2004). These preserved, relict features will then show through the later layer of text, giving us a window onto the textual features of its exemplar.³ Therefore we may find ourselves confronted with a surface text written at one point in time, in one geographical location, but in this text linguistic information may be relayed which is a relict of other times and/or places (Benskin & Laing 1981: 58–59). If later scribes copy the text into a different dialect, then one way in which these relict forms may present themselves is as linguistic forms which are inconsistent with the dialect of the latest scribe. In the case of the *Bede’s* later manuscripts, these relict forms may surface as occasional Mercian features in a predominantly late West-Saxon text.

³ See also the contribution by Minkova in this volume, where the impact of scribal training and spelling norms is discussed in relation to coin evidence.

There are other ways of making distinctions between linguistic features in the *Bede*, besides discerning dialect differences between Mercian and late West-Saxon. For example, we can examine ‘older’ and ‘more modern’ features, and while diachronic change certainly accounts for some of the visible changes, other differences are more nuanced and may be due to the preferences or training of the latest scribe. It is perhaps more nuanced to think of several continua along which various features can move. While a chronological continuum could be established, which has the benefit of being applicable to texts other than the *Bede*, we could also use a continuum which is specific to the texts of the *Bede*, as in Figure 1:

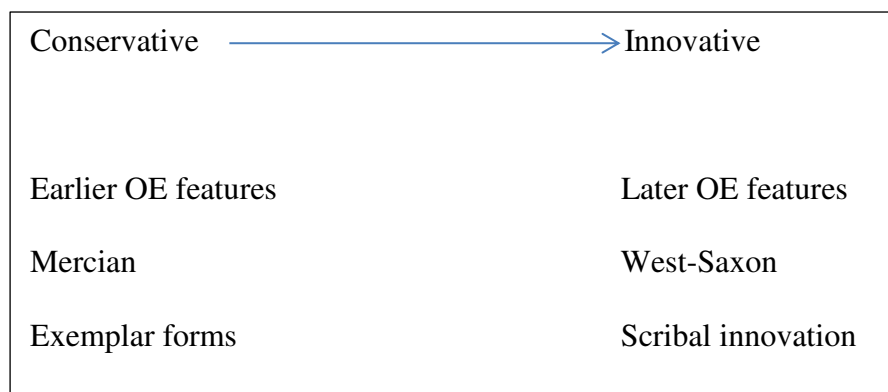


Figure 1. The ‘conservative–innovative continuum’ for the *Bede*

We are able to propose this continuum because the four manuscripts examined in this study can be independently dated through palaeographical

means,⁴ and from this it is evident that certain Mercian features appear more frequently in the older texts. While also being aware that no manuscript is a direct copy of any other in this group, a chronological trend is discernible whereby earlier texts are more likely to contain more Mercian features and later texts are more likely to contain more West-Saxon features.

The *Bede*-specific continuum has been labeled ‘conservative-innovative’, where features are ‘conservative’ *in the context of the Bede* if they are (i) features found more commonly in the earlier texts, (ii) features associated with a Mercian dialect, and (iii) features which (through a combination of (i) and (ii)) are attributable to a manuscript’s exemplar. Having established a number of features which are either ‘old’ or ‘Mercian’, which are more commonly found in the earlier *Bede* manuscripts and which are found to a far lesser extent in the later manuscripts, we can use this group as a kind of measure against which other ‘conservative’ features can be compared. Innovative features, on the other hand, are those which appear to have been introduced into the *Bede* text by a scribe as a result of his own preferred forms, rather than being a relict of the exemplar.

Questions of the transmission of the Latin and Old English versions of the *Bede* have formed the basis of two recent studies. Lapidge (2008) has

⁴ See Stokes (2014: 68): “texts and even linguistic forms can be copied from one manuscript to another, making attribution difficult; but script is much harder to imitate and scribes generally had little reason for doing so.”

shown through a detailed comparison of the surviving Latin and Old English texts that the manuscript from which the Old English translation was made was a more faithful copy of Bede's Latin text than any of the surviving Latin witnesses. His study is particularly useful for us as he demonstrates "how an indirect witness can illuminate a transmissional history" (2008: 245), even when the intervening manuscripts have been lost. Waite (2014) explores the archetype of the Old English *Bede* by comparing the dialect vocabulary of different surviving manuscripts. He advocates the study of the translator's style, in particular the way in which certain Latin terms were translated into Old English. According to Waite, understanding the translator's systematic and precise method allows us to detect the places where lexical substitution is most likely to have been undertaken in subsequent witnesses. Both studies demonstrate fruitful lines of enquiry where exemplars are absent; however, they focus on what later transmission can reveal about lost archetypes and exemplars. The focus of this article, in contrast, is on what such a study can tell us about the motivations, methods, and practices of the scribes who produced our surviving witnesses.

There are several kinds of innovative features introduced by B's scribes. For example, in contrast with the earliest *Bede* manuscripts, B's text tends to contain spellings reflecting breaking before <l>+C rather than retraction (e.g. *eall* rather than *all*), <a> before nasals (e.g. *fram* rather than *from*), and <ode> spellings in weak class 2 preterite verbs (*leornode*, *willnode*, rather than *leornade*, *willnade*). Of all the *Bede* manuscripts, B is

the most consistently West-Saxonized (Wallis 2013: 96–111). Therefore, B1's overall behavior can be categorized as that of a translator scribe. However, he retains a number of small but intriguing exceptions – relict forms – in his copy. That these textual oddities are relicts from the exemplar is highly likely, because the same kinds of features occur in the other *Bede* manuscripts, occasionally in the same place in the text. In addition to relict features, some of B1's innovative forms appear to be attempts to mend or improve on the exemplar text. This has some important implications for what we can deduce about the age and status of B's exemplar. In the next section we consider the relict forms in B.

3. Relict forms

Several types of relict form appear throughout Book 3 of B. Relict forms are important evidence for the behavior of the scribes, as they provide a window onto the state of the exemplar. In B's case, comparison with the other surviving *Bede* manuscripts allows us to map a variety of relict forms present in the exemplar; moreover it suggests that this exemplar lay at the conservative end of the Old English *Bede* continuum. B's relicts include palaeographical features, such as *f*-shaped <y>, as well as morphological and orthographical ones, such as denasalization and double vowels. What is important is that all these features occur in other *Bede* manuscripts, and

especially in the earliest ones, and so they can be placed at the conservative end of the *Bede*-specific continuum outlined above.

3.1 *f*-shaped <y>

B1 has a tendency to write an *f*-shaped <y>, which according to Stokes was “abandoned quite early in the eleventh century” (2014: 190). Ker believed that in the case of B, this uncommon form of <y> was probably written in imitation of the exemplar: “this last form [*f*-shaped <y>], still common in s. x, is rare later and was sometimes used, no doubt, only because the scribe found it in his exemplar” (1957: xxxi). In contrast, B2 never writes *f*-shaped <y>, as a comparison of Figures 2 and 3 shows:

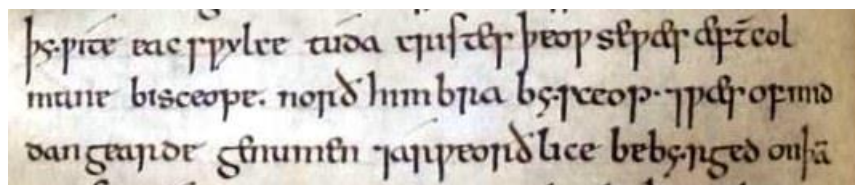


Figure 2. B1’s *f*-shaped <y> (*by*, *bysceop*, and *bebyrged*), and undotted <y> (*swylce*) (p.190)

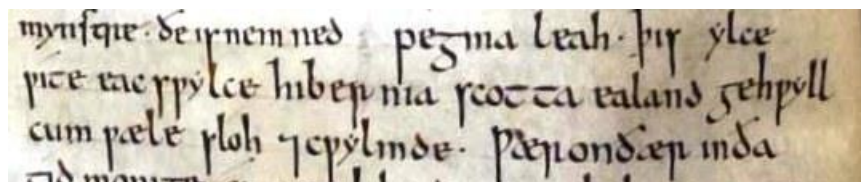


Figure 3. dotted <y> in B2’s hand (*ylce*, *swylce*, *gehwyllcum*,

cwylmde) (p.190)

Figures 2 and 3 also show that neither B1 nor B2 are consistent in the type of <y> they use; B2 frequently uses a dotted <y>, as well as an undotted variant which is shared by B1 in his section of the manuscript. These two illustrations both come from the same manuscript page, where B2 takes over from B1's stint, suggesting that the variation in <y> is indeed due to the preferences of each particular scribe rather than to a pattern in the underlying exemplar.

As a proposed relict form, *f*-shaped <y> is unusual in being a palaeographical feature. However, it also occurs occasionally in O, when written by its second scribe. Another palaeographical relict occurs, also in O, where the third scribe uses half-uncial <r> in his short stint (Wallis 2013: 71). As Ker and Stokes identify *f*-shaped <y> as an archaic form by the time B was written, its presence suggests an exemplar that was not new at the time B1 made his copy. If my reasoning is correct, then this older manuscript may have also contained several other conservative *Bede* features in its text, as the following sections show.

3.2. Denasalization

In at least three places in Book 3, B transmits a reading with denasalization. Denasalization is a feature which in the *Bede* particularly affects plural

subjunctive verbs, whereby the verb loses its final <n>, resulting in readings such as *wolde* for *wolden*. Campbell notes the presence of denasalization in Northumbrian and Mercian texts (1959: Section 472), and it is found to varying degrees across all *Bede* manuscripts. One instance where denasalization is found in all four main manuscripts is given in (1):

- (1) *þa bæd he osweo þone cyning ꝥ he him sume lareowas sealde. þa þe his ðeode to cristes geleafan **gecyrde** 7 mid þam halwendan wylle fullwihtes baðe **apwoqe**.* (p.179)

“Then he asked Oswy the king to send him some teachers, those who might **convert** his people to Christ’s faith and **cleanse** them in the sanctifying wells of baptism.”⁵

Although they look like singular verbs, *gecyrde* and *apwoqe* are actually plural, the subject *þa þe* referring back to the plural *lareowas*. Interestingly, even though B1 uses a late-West-Saxon spelling for *gecyrde* – the earliest manuscript, T, reads *gecerde* – he has preserved the denasalized reading in this position. The fact that denasalization is a relict feature is borne out by the distribution of this feature, as it most frequently occurs in the oldest

⁵ All translations are my own.

manuscript, T, and in O, which retains several other conservative features.⁶

Example (2), however, is unique to B:

(2) *Is þ sæd þ ða hæðenan ðritigu(m) siðu(m) mare werod hæfde*

þon(ne) osweo se cyning mid eahfriðe his suna. (p.186)

“It is said that the heathens **had** an army thirty times bigger than that of king Oswy and his son Eahfrið.”

Like many examples of denasalization found in other *Bede* manuscripts, this instance occurs in a subjunctive preterite plural, in a clause with reported speech. The subject *ða hæðenan* is a plural one, and the retention of a denasalized verb at this particular point is notable, given that B contains only a few other examples of denasalization. The fact that denasalization is often found in the same position in multiple manuscripts, and that it occurs most frequently in the earliest ones, suggests that it is a feature that was present in the original translation and that example (2) is therefore a relict from the exemplar.

⁶ In a number of cases, denasalized verbs occur in more than one manuscript; for example *onsende* (Miller 1890: 159:9) occurs in T, O, and Ca; T and O share *meahte* (164:9), *leornade* (224:25), *worhte* (225:25), *swulte* (250:30), and *lifde* (252:1). This feature is dealt with in more detail in Wallis (2013: 167–173).

3.3 Double vowels

Grant is partly correct when he asserts that “there is, of course, no way to tell how much alteration of older or dialect forms had already been made in B’s immediate exemplar” (1989: 13). However, B contains two scribal performances, and to an extent we can use them to control for some of the features we see in B. The differing treatment of double vowels by B1 and B2 is one example of this, and it suggests that at least some of these double vowels were present in B’s exemplar.

As we can see from Table 1, in the part of Book 3 copied by B1 double vowels such as those in words like *tiid* and *riice* occur in all four *Bede* manuscripts, though they appear predominantly in T. Although O and Ca contain far fewer examples, these spellings nevertheless occur on occasion, with O preserving readings such as *uup* and the place-name *on briige*, which appears in all manuscripts. B’s exemplar evidently also contained double vowels, because they have been copied by B1, and a selection of B1’s examples is presented in the right-hand column.

Table 1. Double vowels in B1. The figures for T, O and Ca are for the sections of the manuscripts corresponding with B1’s copy. Figures in brackets indicate the total count per item for the whole of Book 3.

	T	O	Ca	B1

<i>tiid</i>	9 (15)			1
<i>too</i>				1
<i>uup(pan)</i>		1 (1)		1
<i>wool</i>	5 (5)			1
<i>on briige</i>	3 (3)	1 (1)	1 (1)	3
<i>in caale</i>	1 (1)			1
<i>diioma</i>				1
<i>good-</i>	7 (7)			
<i>riice</i>	10 (15)			
<i>liif</i>	5 (7)			
<i>hii</i>	2 (2)	2 (2)	2 (2)	1

Immediately noticeable is the distribution of double vowels in T and B. T often transmits multiple instances of a particular spelling: *tiid* occurs fifteen times in total, nine of these in the equivalent sections to B1's stint, and *wool* occurs five times. In contrast, items showing double vowels in B often occur only once, the exception being the place name *on briige*. A number of words which commonly have double vowels in T, such as *good-*, *rice*, and *liif*, do not appear with such spellings in Book 3 of B.

It is possible that B1 was more likely to retain a double vowel combination when it occurred in a proper noun, as over half of his examples belong to personal or place names, such as *on briige* (Faremoutiers-en-Brie, x3), *in caale* (Chelles, x1), and the personal name *diioma* (x1). This may have been motivated by a lack of familiarity with the names on B1's part; the place names are continental ones, and *diioma* is an Irish name. An interesting case is B1's treatment of the Scottish place name *hii* (Iona). This name appears three times in Book 3, and only in the part copied by B1. It seems that *hii* was not familiar to the later scribes of the *Bede*, as in one instance O and Ca (or the scribe of their exemplar) both write *his* in error (Miller, 1890: 160:2). *Hii* was evidently not a place name B1 knew well either; in the only place where he transmits it correctly (Miller, 1890: 160:2), the surrounding text overtly marks it as a name:

(3) *wæs he sendeð of ðam ealande 7 of ðam mynstre þe **hii** is
nemned* (p.140)

“He was sent from that island and from that monastery which is called **Iona**.”

However, in two instances he fails to transmit the name faithfully. In the first, B1 erroneously substitutes *hibernia* for *hii* (4), while in the second, he omits the place name altogether (5):

- (4) *æfter him fylgende wæs on ðone bysceophad finan se wæs eac fram **hibernia** scotta mynstre.* (pp.164–165)

“Finan succeeded him to the bishopric; he was also from **Ireland** (T: **Iona**), the monastery of the Scots.”

- (5) *ƿ hwearf eft on his eþel to ðam mynstre ƿ ealande* (p.177)

*hwearf eft on his eðel to **hii** þæm ealonde* (T: f.42r)

“And returned to his homeland to **the monastery** and island (T: to the island of **Iona**).”

B1’s motivation for the treatment of these two instances of *hii* is unclear, as *hibernia* is clearly not the same as *hii*. While it is true that Iona was an Irish foundation and B1 may have known this, the description of Ireland in example (4) as *scotta mynstre* “the monastery of the Scots” is undoubtedly clumsy, and the preservation of *hii* would have made far better sense. It is possible that in example (5) *hii* was omitted in error, though none of the other manuscripts include the words *ðam mynstre*, and it is tempting to speculate that they were substituted for the original name.

If we are correct in assuming that these non-English personal and place names were unfamiliar to B1, one strategy may have been to copy the names *literatim*. The example of *hii* shows that he struggled to make sense

of the reading, and the only place where he transmitted it faithfully was where the text made it plain that it was the name of a place. In the other two instances, the reading transmitted may be due to an unsuccessful attempt to make sense of the exemplar text. Nevertheless, B1 did retain a few double vowel spellings from ordinary nouns in his copy, such as *tiid* and *wool*, though we will never know, of course, how many double-vowel spellings existed in his exemplar.

In contrast, B2 never writes double vowels in his section of Book 3. It is possible that there were no such spellings in that part of the exemplar; however, T has 17 double vowel spellings in the section corresponding to B2's copy, and it therefore appears that double vowels were a feature that B1 tolerated to a greater degree than B2. The fact that double vowels were a feature of the original translation is suggested by their presence in the earliest two manuscripts, T and Z. T contains 91 words with double vowels in Book 3, while Z's three short excerpts from the *Bede* include *wiif* (x2) as well as *wif* (x1) in its 214 graphic units. O and Ca preserve double vowel spellings to a far lesser degree: O has 8 examples, while Ca has 5.

As double vowels are not the only feature where there appears to be a difference between B1 and B2 in scribal habit, this is certainly an area which will repay further study:

If a manuscript in more than one hand exhibits minor spelling variation between the hands, this points to idiosyncratic spellings being the work

of the latest scribes, whereas a manuscript in a single hand which shows minor spelling variation between its items suggests that its scribe has drawn items from several exemplars with different spelling practices. (Scragg 1992: 351)

Scragg's comment also suggests that, in spite of Grant's (1989: 11) assertion that the differences between B1 and B2 were not worth distinguishing, there *is* a difference between the two in terms of their treatment of double vowels, which in turn shows the different reactions of the two scribes to their exemplar.

B1 is a scribe who, in spite of his tendencies to update the language of his exemplar to West-Saxon forms, does preserve occasional relict forms. In his habit of updating linguistic forms to late-West-Saxon ones, B1 is by far the most consistent of the *Bede* scribes in Book 3, and against this late-West-Saxon backdrop the few relict forms are notable.⁷ The retention of some of these features, such as *f*-shaped <y>, must have been a conscious decision. The evidence of the double vowel spellings suggests that some of these forms were deliberately retained, especially when they were proper nouns belonging to unfamiliar people or places. Here the motivation for

⁷ B2's stint in Book 3 is not long enough to give a detailed picture of his scribal habits; nevertheless we have been able to outline some broad differences between his approach and that of B1, such as their differing attitudes to double vowels and *f*-shaped <y>.

retaining relict forms may have been the lack of an alternative model for the spellings of these names. Nevertheless, B1 was not averse to making textual interventions and, in the case of *hii*, twice altered the text where the name appeared. Finally, some relicts may have been transmitted through oversight on B1's part. The ordinary nouns with double vowels and the denasalized verbs occur rarely, which suggests that despite their occasional presence in the exemplar, the scribe was not making a concerted effort to retain them.

4. B1 as emender

In this section, we turn to some examples of B1's innovative scribal behavior. These examples show B1 emending his copy with varying levels of success, and they appear to show a scribe dealing with textual problems in the exemplar. In the first group of examples, the scribe makes successful alterations which result in a text that makes just as good sense as the original readings in other manuscripts, while in the second set word division appears to play a role in the difficult readings B1 presents. The final set of examples deals with emendations related to graphically based substitution, i.e. where the intervention appears to be based to some degree on the form and sequence of the graphs in the exemplar, and again we see that B1 sometimes struggled in his role as textual emender.

4.1 Successful interventions (lexical substitutions)

In the following examples, B provides a reading which differs from those given by the other *Bede* manuscripts. From this it is evident that B has been emended, as T, O, and Ca agree in their variants against B. However, we can view these alterations as successful textual interventions on the part of B1, as they provide readings which make good sense on their own, and without the evidence of the other manuscripts, it would be difficult to detect that a substitution had been made. In example (6), B1 substitutes *wimmanna* “women” for the other manuscripts’ *þinnenne* “female servants”:

(6) 7 sona þ geat ðæs mynstres ontynde. 7 eode mid anum hyre
wimmanna to þara wæpnedmanna stowe. (p.150)

7 hio sona þæt geat þæs mynstres ontynde 7 eode mid anre hyre
þinnenne to þære wæpnedmanna stowe. (O: f.37v)

“And she immediately undid the gate and went with one of her
servant women (B: **women**) to the men’s building.”

Although B’s *wimmanna* is not as specific as *þinnenne*, it nevertheless makes good sense and fits both grammatically and semantically. It is possible that the change was motivated by confusion of <þ> and *wynn*, and

subsequent reinterpretation of <nn> as <m>, although B1 is not generally prone to confusion of <p> and *wynn*, and the alteration could be a simple word substitution.

In (7), we also see a change of meaning:

(7) ȝ on missenlice wisan hit wann ȝ wand ȝ præste ða sæmninga
becom hit on ða stowe þær se **goda** cyning ofslagen wæs. (p.145)

ȝ on missen[.]lice dælas hit wond ȝ præste. þa semninga becom
hit on þa stowe þær se **gemyngeda** cyning ofslagen wæs. (O:
f.35r)

“And it struggled and writhed and twisted in different directions,
then suddenly it came to the place where the **good** (O: **aforsaid**)
king had been killed.”

B’s reading *goda* “good” for *gemyngeda* “aforementioned” again replaces the original word with a less specific one. Nevertheless, *goda* is an appropriate adjective to use for Oswald, whose miracle is being related at this point in the text, and it could be argued that the new reading is an improvement on the original. As with example (6), the reason for the substitution is not obvious, though the replacement could have its roots in a textual misreading, perhaps through eyeskip and interpretation of the last

four letters of *gemyngeda* (or a variant spelling such as *gemyn(d)goda*) as *goda*. This is certainly possible, especially if spacing had been irregular in the exemplar at this point or if the word had been split *gemyn(d)|goda* over two lines. The final example in this section is harder to explain away on grounds of mechanical error:

(8) *eall brytene cynn 7 mægða þe syndon on .IIII. **wereda** todælde þ is*

brytta. 7 peohta. 7 scotta. 7 angle (p.134)

*all breotone cynn 7 mægðe þa syndon on feower **gereordo***

todæled. þ is brytta 7 peohta 7 scotta. 7 angla (O: f.29r)

“All the people and tribes of Britain, who are divided among four **troops** (O: **languages**), that is Britons, Picts, Scots, and Angles.”

B1’s substitution of *wereda* “armies” for *gereordo* “languages” is more intelligent than might appear at first sight. This passage narrates the expansion of Oswald’s kingdom to encompass speakers of four of the five languages Bede identifies as being spoken in Britain at the beginning of Book 1 (Miller 1890: 26). A word such as *wereda* is not out of place semantically in a section dealing with military conquest, and it may have appeared more appropriate to the scribe as he copied.

These three examples (along with examples 12, 13, and, to an extent, 16 discussed below) show that B1 was able to make sensible lexical substitutions which were successful in so far as they retained the sense of the text, and would therefore have been undetectable to a reader. In discussing similar substitutions by scribes of poetic texts, Orton suggests that ...

The rejected word was [in these cases] not entirely opaque to the transmitter who altered or replaced it. This may be indicated when the substituted word has the same meaning as the one it seems to have replaced, showing that the transmitter might have been able at least to guess the meaning of the reading in his received text. (Orton 2000: 99)

As we have seen, in two of the three examples above (*wimmanna* and *wereda*), B1 selects a replacement which maintains the meaning of the original text, even if it does not occupy the precise semantic shade of the original. In the third case (*goda*), the meaning is changed, yet as the new reading is appropriate in its context, we cannot rule out the possibility that the change was intentional. The difficulty with interpreting these examples is that we cannot know for certain what motivated B1 to make any of the alterations. Nevertheless, the text as it stands offers no problems of interpretation for the reader, and by that measure we can categorize these interventions as successful.

4.2 Unsuccessful interventions (word division)

In the following examples, B1 emends the text unsuccessfully. By ‘unsuccessfully’, I mean that he provides a text which gives an unsatisfactory reading because the sense of the text is impaired. At first this might sit oddly with the notion of a translator scribe who is keen to update spellings and some lexical items to reflect his own preferred usage, a scribe who co-creates what Robinson describes as “the single most independent or revisionist version of the Old English *Bede*” (1981: 5). However, I argue that B1’s occasional inability to produce a text which makes sense reveals something about the state of B’s exemplar when its scribes copied from it.

In example (9), a misunderstanding of the exemplar’s word division seems to have been responsible for B’s textual variation, with the possibility that dialect forms also occasionally contributed to B1’s confusion. His textual alterations, while providing Old English words which exist, give us a text which in these examples fails to make sense:

- (9) *ða ongann heo on hyre mynstre cyrican timbrian mare eallre
para haligra apostola* (p.142)

*ongon heo on hire mynstre. cirican timbran. in are. ealra para
haligra apostola* (T: f.31v)

“Then she began to build a church at her monastery, **in honor**
(**greater than**) of all the holy saints.”⁸

In example (9), B1 has made two alterations to the text. Firstly, he seems to have mistaken the exemplar’s *in are* “in honor” for the comparative *mare* “greater” (see Figure 4). A misreading of the minims is indicated by the fact that elsewhere in the manuscript he usually writes the West-Saxon variant *on* where other manuscripts have the non-West-Saxon *in*, and the first form appears to be his preferred usage. Secondly, he alters the genitive plural *ealra* to the dative singular *eallre*, interpreting the phrase as a dative of comparison (Mitchell 1985: Section 1360). This revealing course of action suggests that in this case, when faced with a problematic reading, his answer was to make the grammar of the surrounding text conform rather than to seek an alternative reading for *mare*. The reading in example (9) indicates that in this particular instance, B1’s copying and correction strategy was to look only locally for a solution to a textual problem and to assume that the answer lay in restoring grammatical concord.⁹ This also suggests that B1 did not have access to (or chose not to consult) an alternative text of the *Bede*

⁸ “*Cum enim esset abbatisa, coepit facere in monasterio suo ecclesiam **in honorem** omnium apostolorum*” (Plummer 1896: 144).

⁹ For a parallel correction strategy, see Wallis (2016: 18–19).

(either Latin or Old English) when making a choice about the reading in his exemplar.

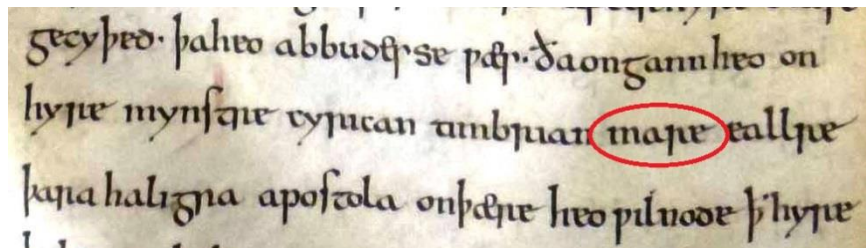


Figure 4. B1's substitution of *mare* for *in are* (p.142)

A further instance of an unsatisfactory textual intervention occurs in (10):

- (10) 7 swa wæs geworden þæt se godes wer þurh witedomes gast þone storm **towearp næfre sæde**. 7 ðurh þæs ylcan gastes mægen þa upcumen wæs þæt he hine aswefede 7 gestilde. þeah ðe he licumlice ðær **æfterwearð** wære. (p.162)

7 swa wæs geworden þæt se godes wer þurh witedomes gast þone storm **towardne foreseah**. 7 þurh þæs ylcan gastes mægen þa he uppcumende wæs 7 hine aswefede 7 gestillde þeah þe he licumlice þær **efwearð** wære. (O: f.43v)

“And so it happened that the man of god **foresaw the coming** storm through the spirit of prophecy. And through the strength of that same spirit when it was arising he soothed and stilled it, even though he was physically **absent** (was physically there **afterwards**).”¹⁰

Again, faulty word-division plays a part in the new reading. If B’s exemplar had irregular spacing at this point, then this might account for B1’s misdivision of *towardne*, in reading *ne* as the beginning of the next word; Anglo-Saxon scribes do sometimes provide spaces between word-elements, and it would not be unusual to see a reading where a scribe had left a gap between the main word and a prefix or inflection (Orton 2000: 57–60). B1 may not have recognized or understood *foreseah*, as Campbell lists it as a specifically Anglian word (1951: 357). However, this fails to account for how the scribe dealt with the rest of the phrase. It is possible, given that several of the letters appear in the same place or sequence as in the other manuscripts (i.e. *næfre sæde* for *ne foreseeah*), that the scribe was experiencing difficulty in reading parts of the exemplar at this point, and aimed to retain the letters he could make out with certainty. In addition, B

¹⁰ “*sicque factum est, ut uir Dei et per prophetiae spiritum tempestatem praedixerit futuram, et per uirtutem eiusdem spiritus hanc exortam, quamuis corporaliter absens, sopiuerit*” (Plummer 1896: 158).

replaces the word *efweard* with *æfterwearð*. A search of the *Dictionary of Old English corpus* for *æfterwearð*/*æfterwearþ* yields no results. It therefore appears that B1 wrote <ð> in error for <d>.¹¹ This type of copying error is not unheard of in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts; Orton (2000: 23) notes an instance in *The death of Edgar* where the scribe wrote *weard* for *wearð*. If B1 did intend to write *æfterweard* for *efweard*, the substitution is puzzling, as *æfterweard* “afterwards” makes no sense in this context. It can perhaps be explained by B1’s interpretation of *ef(t)* as an abbreviation for *æfter*, missing a suspension mark. This is not unfeasible, as the spelling *æft* occurs twice in B and once in T where other manuscripts read *eft*.

Example (11) is another instance of a problem prompted by irregular word-division.

(11) ȝ forðon eanflæd seo cwen his mage for clænsunge his unrihtan
sleges bæd osweo þone cyning. þæt he **for ge fæder** stowe
mynster on to timrienne þam foresprecenan godes ðeowe
trumhere. (p.188)

ȝ forþon eanflæd seo cwen his mage fore geclænsunge his
unrihtes sleges. bæd oswio þone cyning þæt he **þær forgefe** stowe

¹¹ As B1 also writes *stuðu* on p. 147 where the other manuscripts read *studu*, the appearance of <ð> for <d> above is not an isolated phenomenon in his scribal stint.

*mynster on to timbrienne þam foresprecenan godes þeowe
trumhere.* (O: f.55r)

“And therefore queen Eanflæd his kinswoman asked of King Oswiu that he should **donate** (*for ge fæder*) land there on which to have a monastery built by Trumhere, the aforementioned servant of God, as atonement for his unrighteous killing.”

In the equivalent passage in O, the spelling of the verb *forgefe* lacks palatal diphthongization, and it is possible, if B’s exemplar also read *forgefe* rather than the West-Saxon *forgeafe*, that such a spelling may have triggered the misunderstanding. Although the other three manuscripts are unanimous in placing *þær* before *forgefe*, a position after the verb (*forgefe ðær*, for example) in the exemplar may then account for B’s rather odd *for ge fæder*. The Latin confirms that *forgefe* must have been the original reading, because it translates *donaret*.

On a number of occasions, then, B1 provides a reading which comparison with the other manuscripts reveals to be an error due to the misdivision of words. It is possible that an exemplar with irregular spacing was the cause of such a scribal response. If this is the case, then it is notable that for these examples B1’s skills only extended as far as making the subsequent letter strings into real Old English words and not as far as ensuring that sense was maintained at clause level.

4.3 Graphically based substitutions

This final section considers a group of emendations which are unusual in that they seem to imitate the general shape of the word supplied in the other manuscripts. In several instances the new word makes just as good sense as the one it replaces. Orton (2000: 197) notes that in poetic manuscripts such substitutions happen often, and usually with an appropriate word chosen, as the meaning of the original is retained. Nevertheless, he concludes that “although many changes in this category suggest a fair understanding of the text, the motive behind them is often unguessable.”

4.3.1. Substitutions which retain meaning

In example (12), the only variation in the different manuscript readings is in the word’s initial letter, and the meaning is not altered by the change. There is no dialectal difference between *leode* and *þeod*, and they both mean *people, a nation*. Their visual similarity may therefore have been one of the factors behind their interchangeability in B.

(12) (W)ÆS *pyses ylcan godes mannes gewuna þa he in east seaxu(m)*

*bysceop þenunge brucende wæs. þ he gelomlice his agene **þeode** ȝ*

mægðe norhimbraland sohte (p.181)

*Wæs þysses ylcan godes monnes gewuna þa he on east seaxum
bisceop þegnunge brucende wæs þæt gelomlice his agene **leode**
norþanhymbra mægþe sohte (O: f.51r)*

“It was the habit of this holy man, when he was undertaking his
ministry among the East Saxons, that he frequently sought his
own **people** (*leode/peode*) and kin in Northumberland.”

Likewise, (13) shows a similarity in the visual shape of the two phrases *æt
gereorde* and *æt beode*:

(13) *ða dyde se broðor swa se oðer hine bæd ȝ com eft on ham þa his
gebroðro **æt gereorde** sæton. (p.128)*

*þa dyde þe broþor swa he hine bæd. ȝ com eft on æfen ham. þa þa
broþor **æt beode** sæton. (O: f.26r)*

“Then the monk did as he was asked by his brother, and came
back home to where his brethren sat **at their meal** (O: **at the
table**).”

In this case, the substitution of *æt gereorde* “at [their] meal” for the other
manuscripts’ *æt beode* “at table” does not radically alter the meaning of the
passage. While it is, of course, possible that B’s scribe has elected

independently to substitute one lexical item for another, it is interesting to note that the two words *gereorde* and *beode* contain the same diphthong, end consonant, and (to an extent) rhyme. This raises the possibility that the substitution was made on an auditory level, i.e. that the scribe was writing from dictation, or that he was ‘mishearing’ the word in his head as he read from his exemplar and then copied his text:

It may well be that in many such cases what happens is that the scribe moves from copying in a purely visual way to copying via ‘the mind’s ear’. Instead of reproducing a perhaps laboriously interpreted visual image, the visual image is now interpreted at a glance; and what is held in the mind between looking at the exemplar and writing down the next bit of text, is not the visual symbols, but the spoken words that correspond to them. What the scribe reproduces is then the words that he hears, not the visual images from which they arose: *regardless of whether his lips move, he is writing to his own dictation.* (Benskin & Laing 1981: 6; emphasis mine)

The problem with viewing these examples as emendations at an audio level is that, although there are several cases where the sounds of the words may have been quite similar, these word pairs also have similar spellings or letter-sequences, and so a visual motivation for the change cannot be ruled out. From this point of view the emendations in this section bear

resemblances to those discussed earlier, where alternative word division is combined with a similar sequence of letters in the new reading. As an alternative explanation, then, it is possible that B1 was copying from an exemplar which was not very easy to read and that he had to make a ‘best guess’ at its reading in some places. Whatever the reason for these substitutions, B’s new readings in examples (12) and (13) make sense, and like the successful lexical substitutions examined earlier, it is only by comparison with other *Bede* manuscripts or Bede’s Latin that we become aware that a (successful) lexical substitution has taken place (Orton 2000: 47).

4.3.2 Substitutions resulting in nonsense readings

Despite B1’s successful emendations in examples (12) and (13), a number of other similar readings do not make sense. In these cases, B1 substituted for the original word one which fits badly with the sense of the text around it, yet which in some way imitates the shape of the word found in the other manuscripts. So, while in (14) below, *brædran* “broader” is obviously a poor choice for describing the *beteran* “most senior/respected” members of the monastery, it does share its initial letter and weak adjectival ending with the original:

(14) *þa ongann heo ymbgangan þa hus ðæs mynstres þara untrumra
cristes þeowena 7 swiðust þara ðe gelyfedre ylðo oððe on
gecorennesse heora þeawa maran 7 **bræðran** wæron.* (p.141)

*þaongan heo ymbgangan þa hus þæs mynstres. þara untrumra
cristes þeowena. 7 swiðust þara þe gelyfedre ylðo wæron. oððe
on gecorenesse heora þeawa maran 7 **beteran** wæron.* (O: f.32v)

“Then she began to go round the dwellings of the monastery of
those servants of Christ who were sick, especially those who were
advanced in age, or who were **greater and better (mightier and
broader)** in the goodness of their conduct.”

Similarly, *lare* and *lafe* are very similar in shape, and this substitution may
have arisen through confusion of letter forms, between an <f> and <r> with
long descenders:

(15) *Mid þy þe þa tyn dagas þæs feowertiglican fæstnes to **lare** wæron.*
(p.183)

*Mid þy þa tyn dagas þæs feowertilican fæstennes to **lafe** wæron.*
(O: f.52r)

“When there were ten days of the forty-day fast still **left (to teach).**”¹²

In both cases it appears that (at least at some points in the manuscript) having a word which best matched the shape of that in the exemplar trumped notions of producing a text with good overall sense. Orton talks about similar variations in poetic manuscripts and says that “they are more than simple copying mistakes, because recognizable words (albeit in forms and positions quite inappropriate to the context) are put together from the wreckage of the original readings” (Orton 2000: 60).

The final example in this section is again an instance of rewording by B1, but this time it seems to have been triggered by the word *gleaunesse*, which occurs in T and Ca spelled with <p> (*wynn*):

(16) *þa he sæmninga se man þ̅ geſeah þa ongan he mid ſcearpre
geleafneſſe on ðære ſtowe haligneſſe beon þær hiſ hoſſ ſwa
hraðe gehæled wearð. 7 he þær tacen aſette. (p.145)*

¹² “*Cumque X dies XL^{mae} restarent*” (Plummer 1896: 175).

*þa he þa se mon ƿ̅ geseah. þa ongeat he mid scearpre gleaunesse
hwæthugu wundurlicre halignesse on þære stowe beon þær his
hors swa hraðe gehæled wæs. 7 he þær tacen asette. (O: f.35r)*

“When the man saw that, then **he perceived with keen wisdom
what kind of wonderful holiness was in that place (he started
to have keen belief in the holiness of that place)**, where his
horse was so quickly healed, and he set a token there.”¹³

B1’s mistaking *gleaunesse* “wisdom” for *geleafnesse* “belief” could have come about in one of two ways. The scribe could have mistaken <p> for <f>, if his exemplar had forms of the graphs which were sufficiently similar. Alternatively, if the exemplar had a reading such as the one in O (*gleaunesse*), it is possible that he confused <u> written for *wynn* for <u> written for /v/. Finally, it is not uncommon in the *Bede* manuscripts to see <g̅> written for <ge>, leading to a misreading of *g(e)leafnesse/g(e)leaunesse* for *gleawnesse*. Additionally, B1 rewords the text, possibly to make his emendation make more sense (although *beon* sits rather awkwardly in the phrase). This suggests that his alteration was intentional, and that B1 went to some trouble to arrange the surrounding text to maintain some kind of

¹³ “*Quo ille uiso, ut uir sagacis ingenii, intellexit aliquid mirae sanctitatis huic loco, quo equus est curatus, inesse; et posito ibi signo*” (Plummer 1896: 146).

sense. The question remains as to why the scribe would have made such an effort to change the text, unless he deemed it necessary.

Faced with a difficult reading in B, we are again left to speculate about the condition of the text from which it was copied; if B1 really is the reforming scribe suggested by his adoption of several late West-Saxon phonological, morphological, and orthographical features (Wallis 2013: 96–111), is it likely that unfamiliarity with a form alone would be the reason for the production of such a mangled reading? In some of the examples above (e.g. *mare* for *in are*, *geleafnesse*), B1 apparently tried to remedy a deficiency in the text caused by his new reading, which leaves us with two possibilities in considering the cause of these textual changes. Firstly, it is possible that B1 was an overzealous corrector of his text; however, if that were the case, we have to ask ourselves how satisfied a translator scribe would be with producing an incomprehensible text in these places. B1 certainly does not appear to be the kind of scribe to slavishly copy his exemplar, so it seems unlikely that he would choose to produce a nonsensical text. A second option is that B's exemplar was so poor that in attempting to remedy it, the scribe chose to follow as closely as possible what was written. As the text in front of him was illegible in places, he was unable to make good sense of his text and had to use all his resources – at times without success – to bring order to the text. If this was the case, then his attempts to make good the text (at least in some places) were unsuccessful.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, then, it is clear that B1 is a translator scribe, in that he emends spellings on both a phonological and a morphological level. Nevertheless, he also retains a number of relict features, with varying levels of consistency. What is interesting about the conservative features he preserves is that they are so varied, as they include palaeographic relicts, as well as orthographical and morphological ones. For two of the features examined here, *f*-shaped <y> and double vowels, B1's usage differs from that of B2, which suggests that the distribution of the features is due to the latest scribes (B1 and B2), and not to their exemplar. It also demonstrates that the present scribes were responsible for at least some of the innovative features associated with B, and which made it, in the eyes of many early scholars, a disappointing object of study as far as the Old English *Bede* was concerned. Furthermore, the presence of these relict features suggests that B's exemplar was at the rather conservative end of the *Bede* continuum in many ways, and perhaps an old manuscript by the time B was copied from it.

Additionally, there are instances where B1 acted as a textual emender, with varying levels of success. In some cases, he was able to make convincing lexical substitutions which are detectable only by comparing B with the text found in other manuscripts. In other cases, he was clearly less

successful. In the places where B's variant reading makes little sense, problems seem to arise through a misdivision of words or through a partial reading which appears to retain the order and form of some of the graphs of the original. In these cases, we might speculate that such a problematic reading arose where the scribe had difficulty in construing the exemplar, for example where it had become illegible through age or damage of some kind. Therefore, although the scribe demonstrates a high level of innovation in some features and sometimes makes these substitutions well and fairly consistently, in other cases he transmits unsatisfactory readings based on the letters or spellings he could salvage from the exemplar. This course of action is supported by B1's action when dealing with some relict forms. In some of these cases (for example where there are double vowels), his transmission of relicts appears to be due to his unfamiliarity with some of the name forms he encounters, and the example of *hii* (and other proper nouns with double vowels) shows us that B1's tendency to interfere with and update his exemplar text was tempered by his retention of exemplar spellings when faced with unfamiliar names. This sheds valuable light on B1's behavior as an emender; faced with unfamiliar text, for which he was unable to provide a 'correct' reading according to his own training and scribal norms, he copied *literatim*. In grappling with the text and providing a reading which is clearly unsatisfactory, it appears that B1 resorted to transmitting as much of the text as he could by making the letters of the exemplar fit words he knew, even if the resulting reading made little sense.

Far from being a “careless fellow” (Grant 1989: 10) and incompetent copyist, B1 reveals himself to be a scribe deeply engaged in updating and emending his text, using all his resources to copy from a challenging and possibly at times illegible exemplar.

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